

Bible Study Series 2

God's Gifts Amongst Us

Prepared by Richard Collyer for the LCA Vic/Tas District African Ministry and Mission Reference Group (January 20, 2015).

Introduction

The intention of this Bible Study is to provide Scriptural guidance for general living for African and other ethnic communities. It uses The 10 Commandments as discussed in Luther's Small Catechism as the main basis of this exploration. It is designed to encourage investigation, reflection, conversation, prayer and action in mixed age and gender groups.

In all communities or ethnic groups there can be divisions such as between men and women, young people and adults, different tribal identities. People can be strangers to each other even though they are baptised into Christ. God comes to us as gift in Jesus who shows us the Law but also the good news of the Gospel.

This study arose out of the work of Pastor Allan Heppner who, whilst the Pastor for Congregational Support in Victoria, took a very keen interest in working with African refugees and migrants in Victoria. After his death a Memorial Fund was established to honour his work and to provide funding so that it can continue. This Bible Study is one of those projects.

Understanding the ways and will of God and walking in faith are never solitary activities. As the body of Christ we support, challenge and encourage one another as we share our individual experiences and understanding of God's Word.

The Holy Spirit always does good guiding when Christians talk and listen to one another over God's Word. Hopefully the discussion will continue with families and friends after each study session.

Sometimes statements, questions and activities may seem a bit challenging or a struggle. The master teacher Jesus was often provocative, pushing his hearers to take a fresh look at traditional and unquestioned truths – this is often when new insights come and spiritual growth happens.

It is perhaps like the struggle Jacob had with the stranger. As Christians we have a unity in Christ. What we are often involved with is to struggle together to become a church with one will to serve Christ together.

This study is based on a series of questions. They are;

1. Who has rescued us?
2. What holds families together?
3. How can I be a good steward of God's gifts?
4. What does "honour your father and mother" mean?
5. Why should we respect the law and those in authority?
6. What does being a good parent look like, sound like, feel like?
7. What does God want to do in my life?
8. Am I becoming a good provider in community and family?

9. How can I grow and develop as a Christian?
10. Where to now and who with?

1. Who has rescued us?

In the Bible, just before we get the list of the 10 Commandments, God says to his people "I am the Lord your God who has rescued you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Exodus 20:2

God says "I have rescued you".

- In what ways have you been rescued by God?

God says "I have rescued you and I am giving you these commandments as a gift, a present".

- In what ways have you been given gifts from God?

The children of Israel came to understand that the whole of life was a gift. To believe in God was to see life as a gift. The world, daily bread, my husband, my wife, my children, my property, my mother, my father, myself and my whole life is a gift. All creation is a gift.

- What song best shows that the whole of life is a gift from God? Would you choose To God Be the Glory or How Sweet the name of Jesus or something else?
- What parts of the Lutheran worship service say that God has rescued us and given us life as a gift?

2. What holds families together?

Jesus says "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." John 14:15

- What holds families together? Is it just rules and regulations?

Jesus knows that loving and caring is the most powerful way of holding people together. It is also true of our relationship with God. The 10 Commandments are given to people who have been rescued by the God who loves us and his whole creation.

- What Bible story or verse do you like that shows God's love for people?
- What will this group suggest be included in the prayer at church on Sunday which talks about God's love for us?

In the Bible, Jesus shows his love to us by giving us the Law and the Gospel.

- What do the following verses say? What do they mean?

The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17

The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Corinthians 3:6

In the Law, God commands good works of thought, word, and deed and condemns and punishes sin. Jesus says "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself." Mark 12:30-31

However, as we all well know, we do not and cannot do this. We fall short, we stumble and fall. Through the law we become aware of our sin. (Romans 3:20)

But in the Gospel, which is the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ, God gives forgiveness, faith, life, and the power to please Him with good works.

In what ways are the following verses similar but also different?

- God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16
- The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. John 6:63
- I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Romans 1:16
- All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. Colossians 1:6

Which one of the above verses do you find most clearly says what the Gospel is?

- In what ways does the parable of The Waiting Father (Luke 15:11-32) show us the Law and the Gospel?

After reading the story in the Bible you may care to view the following presentation of the story at http://www.sermons4kids.com/prodigal_son.ppt

Where, in the Lutheran worship service, do we see and hear the Law and the Gospel?

Prayer/Song

Pray for this study group and finish with the Lord's Prayer.

3. How can I be a good steward of God's gifts?

A steward is a person who looks after another's property. One gift He has given us to look after is money and property.

- In what ways do you see people misuse God's gift of money?

God's Gift of Rescue

What does God say about this gift of money? How should we treat this gift?

In the Seventh Commandment God says "You shall not steal."

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither take our neighbours' money or property nor acquire them by using shoddy merchandise or crooked deals, but instead help them to improve and protect their property and income.

Firstly, this means that God forbids every kind of robbery, theft, and dishonest way of getting things.

Which of the following do you think is theft or stealing?

- Excess profit.
- Forcing people to be refugees.
- Income tax cheating.
- Government mismanagement.
- Vandalism.
- Unjust wages.
- Polluting the environment.
- Destroying property.
- Careless use of land and resources.
- Taking out a loan if you know you cannot pay it back.

Do you have other examples?

Secondly, this commandment also means that we should help our neighbour to improve and protect their possessions and income. We should help our neighbour in every need.

Now where to and who with?

What Christian advice could you give the person in this example?

Sarah is 25 years old and lives with her family – mum, and three brothers. Sarah is the only one with a full time job. (In fact she also has a part time job as well.) Everyone else receives income from Centrelink. Her mother is too ill to work and her youngest brother is studying year 12 in high school. Another brother is studying at TAFE 3 days a week and the third brother gets casual work from time to time but his work often requires him to live away from home for a month or so and he also has a loan on a car. Sarah gets paid fortnightly and she pays half of the family's rental costs each fortnight. She also gives her mother \$100 for food. The other family members pay the rest of the rent and the bills. For several years Sarah has been putting as much money as she can spare each fortnight into a separate bank account sometimes \$100 and sometimes \$200. When she gets her tax refund she also puts that money into the same account. She has never told anyone about the money in this account and she pretends that it doesn't exist. She has never made a withdrawal from this account even when her car needed four new tyres. Now she has saved \$12,000. She feels guilty that she has never told her family that this money exists. She also feels guilty because when her brothers ask if she can loan them some money she pretends that the money doesn't exist and only loans them trivial amounts. She hopes one day to have enough money in this special account to put a deposit on a house so her family doesn't have to keep paying rent.

(from Exploring Differences in Ways with Money by Tiffany Westphal (2012))

Jesus says "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." Luke 16:13

- What does it say? What does it mean? What stands out to you?

St Paul writes "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 1 Timothy 6:6-8

- What does it say? What does it mean? What stands out to you?
 - What do you understand by "godliness" and "contentment"?
- See also 2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:11,19; Job 1:21; Ecclesiastes 5:15
- How much is enough for the Christian? Refer to Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:16-21
 - How can the Christian learn to be content with simple living? See also Romans 12:1-2; Psalm 62:10
 - In the Old Testament the people gave a tenth of their income to God as an offering. Do you think that this is a good guide for us today? How much should people give to the Lord?
 - How important is it for a husband and wife to sit down together and make a budget? (For more on this topic see the Appendix 1 below)

God has given us many other gifts.

- What might be some of them?

- Which gifts do African people treasure most? How has this changed since African people have come to live in Australia?
- Which gifts do you see non-African Australians treasure most?

Prayer/Song

- Pray for this nation that we may all come to see the land and property as gift.
- Pray for refugees, who suffer the loss of home and property.
- Pray for your neighbour by singing or saying the words of this song:

*A new commandment I give unto you,
that you love one another, as I have loved you,
that you love one another, as I have loved you;
by this shall all men know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.*

*By this shall all men know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.*

(Lutheran Hymnal # 853 Author Unknown)

4. What does 'honour your father and mother' mean?

- In what ways do parents' have responsibility for their children? How should they raise their children? How much freedom should children have? When do parents fail in raising their children?
- In what ways do children show a lack of respect for their parents? How much freedom should children have?
- In what ways is raising your children different in Australia to that in Africa? In what ways is it similar?

God's Gift of Rescue

In the Small Catechism Martin Luther puts it this way; God says in the fourth commandment: Honour your father and mother.

- What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents...but instead serve, honour, obey, and respect them.

Now where to and who with?

How can we serve, honour, obey, and respect our parents?

St Paul writing to the people in Ephesus says:

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4)

- What does it mean for parents to bring their children up in the training and instruction of the Lord? What example should parents show?
- How should parents talk with their children? Should they ever become angry?
- Should parents make sure that their children are baptised and regularly take them to church and say prayers at night together? At what time of the day should they tell them Bible Stories and say prayers? Which songs would be good to start with?
- When there is a time of great argument, or things have gone wrong in a family, how could parents reconcile with their children so that they show Christian love and forgiveness?
- What is a good prayer to pray with the whole family? What is a good song that the family can all sing and join in?
- There is a German tradition of having a Bible open on a small table or shelf near the front door of your home. It could be open at the week's Gospel reading which was read on Sunday. Each member of the family could take it in turns to make sure that it is open at the correct place. How could this happen in your home?
- In what ways do Commandments 1 and 6 and Luther's explanation of them in the Small Catechism also connect with this 4th commandment?

Prayer/Song

Luther's Morning Prayer

My Heavenly Father, I thank You, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, that You kept me safe from all evil and danger last night. Save me, I pray, today as well, from every evil and sin, so that all I do and the way that I live will please you. I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have. Let Your holy Angels be with me, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me. Amen.

Luther's Evening Prayer

My Heavenly Father, I thank You, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, that You have protected me, by Your grace. Forgive, I pray, all my sins and the evil I have done. Protect me, by Your grace, tonight. I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have. Let Your holy angels be with me, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me. Amen.

5. Why should we respect the law and those in authority?

In what ways have you seen people show disrespect to the law and those in authority like politicians, school teachers and the police? In what ways have you seen police and politicians show disrespect to the people?

God's Gift of Rescue

In the Small Catechism Martin Luther puts respect for the law and those in authority this way.

God says in the fourth commandment: Honour your father and mother.

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and others in authority but instead serve, honour, obey, and respect them.

And God says in the first commandment: You shall have no other gods instead of me.

What does this mean?

We are to fear, love and trust in God above all things.

Now where to and who with?

- All authorities in courts, governments, schools and police are gifts of God. They are given to all by God for the task of governance. How do we honour these?
- Is it OK just to say that the government is always right no matter what they do?
- How do you "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) in situations where you disagree with a politician or school teacher or church leader?
- When can governments behave as if they are making themselves into god?
- What are the two tasks of good government? See Romans 13:4 ; Psalm 82: 1-4
- How should Christians vote? See Genesis 2:15 & Psalm 24:1, Matthew 5:9, John 8:32, Genesis 1:27, Matthew 6:33 & Proverbs 8:12-13, Deuteronomy 30:19
- Should governments tell the truth? John 8:32

Prayer/Song

Pray together by singing or saying the words of this song, The Prayer of St Francis.
(Lutheran Hymnal # 858)

1. *Make me a channel of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me bring your love
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord,
and where there's doubt, true faith in you.*
2. *Make me a channel of your peace:
where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
where there is darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy.*
3. *O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled, as to console,*

*to be understood, as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

4. *Make me a channel of your peace,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving to all men that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to life.*

by Sebastian Temple based on St Francis of Assisi

6. What does being a good parent look like, sound like, feel like?

- In what ways do you see and hear a husband and wife being poor parents?
- How is it better for a marriage that in Australia it is against the law for a husband to hit or beat his wife?
- It is acceptable in Australian families for the husband to change the baby's nappy. What is the situation in Africa?
- What other examples can you think of where there is a difference between what is acceptable for parents in Australia and those in Africa?
- What do you think is difficult in raising children in Australia?
- Where do you see the gift of sexuality to control, to exploit and to bring division?

God's Gift of Rescue #1

At the very start of the discussion in the Small Catechism of the 10 Commandments Martin Luther writes:

What parents as heads of the family should teach their children.

Now where to and who with?

- What are some good ways in which mothers and fathers can teach their children the 10 Commandments and what they mean?
- What, if any, books or CD's or videos could help?
- In your family, when might be a good time of the day or week to teach the Small Catechism?
- How might mothers and fathers get to know the Small Catechism better?
- How might your congregation help parents teach their children to know the 10 Commandments?

God's Gift of Rescue #2

In the Small Catechism Martin Luther writes this way about the 6th Commandment.

God says in the 6th Commandment: You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we lead pure and decent lives in word and deed, and each of us loves and honours his or her spouse.

Now where to and who with?

- What does Genesis 1:27, 31 say about sexuality?

- How does 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 help us understand that God requires us to use our sexuality in ways pleasing to Him? What does our bodies' being God's temple mean?
- In what ways does Ephesians 5:21-23, 25 give us a rich understanding of marriage?
- In what ways is Ephesians 5:21-23, 25 very different to this text from the Qur'an? "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient... As for those from whom you fear obedience, admonish them, forsake them in beds apart, and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them." Qur'an 4:34: (*The Koran*, 2006, tr N J Dawood, Penguin, London.)
- The following 10 commandments of a Christian marriage are based on God's 10 Commandments. How helpful do you think they are?

1. You shall not beat your spouse.
2. You shall not nag your spouse.
3. You shall not be absent or unavailable in the home.
4. You shall not intimidate (frighten) your spouse.
5. You shall not neglect the needs of your family.
6. You shall not make family decisions by yourself alone.
7. You shall not falsely accuse your spouse.
8. You shall not hide things from your spouse.
9. You shall not be hardhearted and tough with your spouse.
10. You shall not misuse sex in marriage.

(From [A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa](#). These commandments say what a husband and wife should not do. The group may like to suggest what should happen. For a complete discussion of these 10 commandments see the Appendix 2 below)

Prayer/Song

It is a wonderful gift for parents to be able to teach their children the 10 Commandments.

Sexuality is also a wonderful gift. It binds couples together in intimacy and love. It flows through us and in us and into our families, friends and everything that we do. God created a man and a woman. God calls us into families. God has given us these wonderful gifts.

- What could we say in a prayer for all marriages in our congregation?
- What could we pray right now for children, women and men who are caught in a web of abuse?
- What could we say in a prayer for young adults during the church service this coming Sunday?
- What would you add to this picture to best show that marriage and family is God's gift?



7. What does God want to do in my life?

"Who am I?" is a very important question for youth. The search for one's identity takes up a lot of time for teenagers and often adults have to look again at this question. Today there are many groups, cults, ideas, gods who are willing and ready to tell us who we are. One says "You are a sexual being" and your body is your most important possession so nurture it, flaunt it, satisfy it. Another is "You are a self-made being" so look after yourself, look out for number one; it's all about me.

- Where do you see and hear these answers to Who am I?
- What are some other examples of those ideas which are trying to tell us who we are?
- What other questions arise about your identity when African parents and their children now live in Australia?
- What family obligations still affect your answer to the question Who am I?

God's Gift of Rescue

In the Small Catechism Martin Luther writes Baptism is not simple water only but it is water used according to God's command and connected with God's word.

Don Johnson in Praying the Catechism explains that this means that this word of Christ has attended the water in which you were baptised and has spoken to you. It is the same word that spoke in the creation of the whole world when the Bible says "Then God said.....and it was so." Genesis 1: 3-30

- Where else in the Bible did this word come to the world?

This word is in the form of a covenant which God has made with you. This word "covenant" is very important. It is definitely not a contract. A contract says "If you do this then I will do this" or "If you are good and pray then I will keep you as my child and bless you."

God's covenant says "I have made you mine, and you will always be mine." See Isaiah 49: 14-15.

- How do the stories of the Woman at the Well (John 4) and the story of Lazarus (John 11) show God's covenant and the gifts it brings?

God is present in the water of baptism. It is water of promise and water is a gift of God. Water sustains life.

- When have you become most aware of water?
- Is God calling us to care for the water that is around us? What can your congregation do?
- How are baptism and the environment tied together?

God calls us in baptism. This call by God is a call to life lived under the cross. It is a call to use all the gifts God has given us in the service of God and others. In the early church the newly-baptised person wore a white robe during Easter. Pastors in the church continue this practice which reminds us all of the robes of baptism which clothe us in righteousness and justice. And Paul tells us what these clothes look like in Colossians 3:12-14.

- In baptism God calls us to serve. What does Matthew 5:16 say and mean about your calling?

- Consider what you will do in the next 24 hours in your home, your work or school, your community, your world. Who will you meet? What strangers may you greet? What work will you do? What interruptions may you have to deal with? As you contact these people and do your work, this will give glory to God. In Christ all is holy for all is under the saving plan of God. At the end of the 24 hours think about what has happened and give thanks to God for the grace that you experienced.

All the baptised are people of God and share in the work of Christ just as much as any pastor. Part of Christ's work, his ministry, is creative, building up, supporting.

Another part of Christ's work is redemption, healing, reconciling.

Often as fathers, mothers, children, students, workers, whether we are involved in sports or groups, a church member, a friend or wherever God has placed us, we are involved in both creating and healing.

- When have you recently been involved in the creative and healing work of Christ?

Now where to and who with?

The way for a Christian to find out about who he or she is, is to come to the baptismal font and look at those graceful waters and hear these words of God:

"You are someone to whom a *name is given*. It is a gift for you. I have called you a Christian – you are one of mine. I am looking forward to being with you as you grow into this family name along with all the other members of this family, the church. I have big plans for you. You are somebody who is now free to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... (and) love your neighbour as yourself." Matthew 22: 37-39 (from Johnson [Praying the Catechism](#))

In what ways do you think that the Lutheran church could do this better including for migrants and refugees? For example, do you think that people in the Lutheran church:

- Know that the power of the devil is very real.
- Often want to excuse God from any involvement in tragedies such as earthquakes or tsunamis or the accidental death of a child. They perhaps do not know that it is in some way comforting to know that God allowed it, and that it wasn't simply the devil; that if God allowed suffering, can't he also help people in their suffering? If he wounds, can't he also heal?
- Avoid talking about the existence of supernatural realities such as dreams and angels whereas Africans are culturally "free" to talk about them.
- Are surprised that for Africans, time is precious, and there is never too much time that you can spend with people. A 10 minute visit to a person is almost unheard of! When there is a death that African people drop everything and go to visit the family and to be with them. It is always so important that they are not alone in their time of grief, whereas westerners often leave each other alone.

(examples adapted from [Out of Africa: Lessons learned from 5 years of ministry to South Sudanese people](#) by Pastor Stephen van der Hoek 2014)

In his book about baptism *Remember who you are*, William Willimon remembers this practice of his mother: "When I was a young man, every Friday night or Saturday night when I was leaving home to go out with friends or on a date my Christian mother would say farewell with these weighty words, "Don't forget who you are."

- In what ways was this very "weighty" advice and a blessing? Could you use it with your young adults?
- Which of the following verses do you think are most helpful for young people when making decisions? 2 Chronicles 1:7-10 (Note that "wisdom" means "an understanding heart" and "go out and come in" means "knowing the difference between good and evil"), Proverbs 3:6, James 1:5, Proverbs 11:14, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 1 Corinthians 12:5-7.
- For young adults, choosing a marriage partner is a very important decision. How useful are the following Eight Tests of True Love?

Eight Tests of True Love

1. The talk-freely test.

"Can we talk with each other freely?"

2. The habit test.

"Do I want to spend my whole life with this person, even if his/her habits never change?"

3. The no-touching test.

"Do we really appreciate each other's personality, or do we just enjoy touching each other's body?"

4. The admiration test.

"Do we have reasons for admiring each other ... or do we just have a lovely feeling?"

5. The knowing-each-other test.

"Do we know each other ... past and present?"

6. The love-for-Christ test.

*"Are we helping each other to love Christ more? Are **both** of us interested in obeying and serving Christ ... or is just one of us really interested?"*

7. The giving test.

"Do I want to give love and happiness to him/her? Is he/she a happy person who wants to give love and happiness to me?"

8. The forgive-after-quarrel test.

"After a quarrel, can both of us say 'sorry'? Can we forgive? Are we unselfish enough to listen to each other's ideas? Can we reach an agreement?"

Remember: Sex is not a test of love!

(From Britten, *Questions Young People Ask*.)

In times of great doubt Martin Luther would sometimes touch his forehead and say to himself: "Martin be calm, you are baptised."

- In what ways is this advice helpful? When could you use it?
- When Christians touch their forehead after they receive the wine in Holy Communion how does this remind them of their baptism?

In what ways do Commandments 1, 2 and 5 and Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism also connect with God's calling of us in baptism?

Prayer/Song

1. Write your name in the middle of half an A4 piece of card or paper. Through your name draw a cross. What does this show about you?
2. In the upper left hand corner of the card write the names of your family and the names of those who are close to you.
3. In the upper right hand corner write your work such as at home, attending school, your job/occupation(s), your responsibilities.
4. On the lower right hand corner, write your community. You may be involved in church, clubs or groups or international organisations. These are all part of your community.
5. Finally in the lower left hand corner place the word environment. Write any connections you have with the environment through your own interests and activities such as bush walking, gardening or groups you belong to that are concerned with the environment. The environment is a part of God's creation and our call in baptism.

You are now invited to look at the places where you are called to live and serve and to remember them in your prayers over this next week. Place this card next to your bed or somewhere that you can easily see it.

(from Praying the Catechism by Donald Johnson (2008))

Write a group prayer of thanksgiving for the people you are, the people God has made you.

8. Am I becoming a good provider in community and family?

- Have you heard of people being invited to come to Jesus so that they can get what they can out of the Lord?
- Where do you especially see people being urged to buy things they do not need? How does this work?
- How have you seen divisions in the church spread so that people do not forgive each other?

God's Gift of Rescue

In the Small Catechism Martin Luther talks about being a good provider this way when he comments on Commandments 8, 9 and 10.

God says in the 8th Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbours, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.

God says in the 9th Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbour's house.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we do not try to trick our neighbours out of their inheritance or property or try to get it for ourselves by claiming to have legal right to it and the like, but instead be of help and service to them in keeping what is theirs.

God says in the 10th Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey or anything that is your neighbours.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we do not entice, force, steal away from our neighbours their spouses, household workers, or livestock, but instead urge them to stay and fulfill their responsibilities to our neighbour.

Now where to and who with?

- How do we do fulfill these commandments?
- Did God promise to fulfill our needs or our wants? What Bible verses or Bible stories can you recall that talk about needs and wants?

Prayer/Song

- Could you pray for husbands and wives, that their lives together may be supported by friends and neighbours?
- Could you pray for wisdom to know the difference between needs and wants?
- Could you pray for your congregation so that people are able to reconcile and forgive one another?
- Could you pray for all those who have been baptised that they and we may be washed of sin and that the life in God will arise in all of us?

- What song could you sing that talks about being a good neighbour?

9. How can I grow and develop as a Christian?

The people of Israel were slaves in the land of Egypt. They spent long hours with little reward. During Martin Luther's day there were many holy days and days of rest.

Our lives can be very busy attending to family, going to work, attending school, and being involved in sports or clubs and activities. We have many ways in which to save time and labour such as washing machines, mobile phones, computers and cars. These can all lead us to ever increasing busyness. Even holidays can be forced relaxation time when we must do what we cannot do at other times. Sporting clubs often now hold games on Sundays. Australian culture invites us to fill every moment with sound, excitement and doing. The gods of the day drive us so that we have little time.

- In what ways do you find that there are pressures on family and friends to not relax, rest and gather together as church? How is this different to what you experienced in Africa?
- What sorts of excuses do you hear for people not attending church?

God's gift of Rescue

In the Small Catechism Martin Luther talks about it this way:

God says in the 3rd Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching or God's Word, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it.

Now where to and who with?

God's gave us rest and trust: trust that the gifts of God would be given in the rhythm of six days for work and one day for rest and prayer.

God says:

- Remember the Sabbath.
- Remember rest.
- Remember prayer.
- Remember the Word.
- Remember the Sacrament.
- Remember the God who speaks to a quiet world.

What do we need to confess to the Lord about our busyness in trying to survive so that we have no time for God, family, friends, for neighbours, and for care for the earth?

How best can we make sure that we attend church regularly? Could it be written on a calendar and attached to the fridge?

God comes to us at each church service. He comes to serve us in the Word and sacraments. Read through the pamphlet [The Service with Communion explained](#) and share it with your

family. It is available from Lutheran Tract Mission (email: tracts@lll.org.au or phone 08 8360 7200.

When is a good time to share devotion in your family and say a prayer together?

What are some good resources for family devotions? Are there any good devotion books for children and young adults? What devotion books are good for husbands and wives?

There is a saying that "The family that prays together stays together." What do you think? What kinds of Family Prayers do you have in your families?

In the Christian growth of children the parents' example in everyday life is a very strong lesson. How have you experienced this? What good examples have you seen in families?

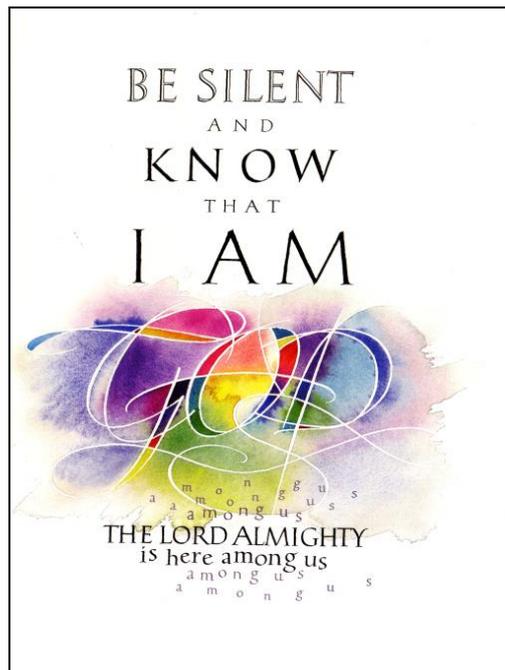
Some older Christians have had the regular custom to read the Bible through once every year. Is this a good idea? Could it work for you? What would it show your children?

Is it a good idea when your young people leave home to go and live in, say Melbourne, to ask a pastor in Melbourne to contact your child? How can you find out about Lutheran groups there are in Melbourne for young people?

In what ways do all/any of the Commandments and Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism also connect with this 3rd commandment?

Prayer/Song

- Pray for people under stress from overwork.
- Pray for a time of quiet.
- Read together Psalm 139.
- Look at the following picture by Timothy Botts and allow the calligraphy to reveal something of who God is.



- Here are some names for worshipping God.

Almighty Father, Counselor, Guardian, Healer, Hope, Holy Spirit, Light of Life, Prince of Peace, Servant, Water of Life, Well-spring, Jesus Saviour, Shepherd, Comforter.

What others do you know and use?

Is there a name for God that is particularly meaningful to you at this moment?

Breathing deeply, quietly repeat the name. Rest in the name. Tell God what you sense about him through his name. Thank and honour him. Sing a song that uses the name.

From *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by A. Calhoun (2005)

10. Where to now and who with?

What is the summary of Commandments 1-3?

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:5).

What is the summary of Commandments 4-10?

"And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew. 22:39; Leviticus 19:18).

- In what ways has this study been helpful in your Christian journey?
- What would you like to learn more about?
- In what ways might you share what the Lutheran church/your congregation could learn from your Christian experience?

Prayer/Song

- Choose a Psalm that you would all like to share and read it together.
- Sing a song that you all know.

Leader's Notes:

For this Bible Study you will need to prepare in several ways.

1. Pray for an understanding heart.
2. Pray for the group.
3. Read through the study guide beforehand and make sure that you have all the materials and resources ready.
4. Resources needed are:
 - Copies of the Bible.
 - A copy or copies of Luther's Small Catechism. Perhaps a CD in languages other than English may also be available.
 - Copies of this Study booklet.
 - Copies of The Service with Communion Explained available free from Lutheran Tract Mission (email: tracts@lll.org.au or phone 08 8360 7200.)
 - Paper or card half A4 size for each group member for topic # 7.
 - For the study of The Waiting Father (study topic #2) be prepared to show http://www.sermons4kids.com/prodigal_son.ppt

References and Acknowledgements

A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa, Theological Advisory Group, Scott Theological College, Kenya (1996).

An Explanation of the Small Catechism, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (1991)

Exploring Differences in Ways with Money by Tiffany Westphal (2012)

Learning Together: How to Strengthen the Family - A Participant's Book for Family Ministry, prepared by Anna-Kaarina Palmu and Matti Palmu (The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Helsinki 2008)

Lutheran Treasures Crossing the Cultural Divide by Pastor Matt Anker (Lutheran Theological Journal 2014)

Out of Africa: Lessons learned from 5 years of ministry to South Sudanese people by Stephen van der Hoek. Presented to LCA Third National African Conference, Tullamarine, Victoria (2014)

Praying the Catechism by Donald Johnson (Augsburg Press 2008)

Questions Young People Ask, Bruce and Carol Britten, (Raey Publishers, Addis Ababa 2000).

Remember who you are by William Willimon (Upper Room Books 1980)

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook by A. Calhoun (IVP Books 2005)

The Bible

The Service with Communion explained, Lutheran Tract Mission (phone 08 8360 7200 or email: tracts@ll.org.au)

The Small Catechism by Martin Luther

http://www.sermons4kids.com/prodigal_son.ppt

Special thanks to the LCA Vic District's African Mission and Ministry Reference Group for initiating, supporting and reviewing this Bible study series.

Extra Resources

Spiritual Warfare by John Kleinig. Seminar presented at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Traralgon February 2014. (See also Ch 4 Spiritual Warfare in J Kleinig [Grace Upon Grace](#) (Concordia Publishing House 2008)

Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot and Cold Climate Cultures by Sarah A. Lanier (McDougall 2000)

Learning Together: How to Strengthen the Family - A Participant's Book for

Family Ministry, prepared by Anna-Kaarina Palmu and Matti Palmu has Bible Studies on e.g. Physical Love Without Shame - Shulammite Maiden and the Shepherd - Song of Songs 2: 14 - 5: 1; 7: 1 - 8:14, Forgiveness as a Foundation - The Marriage of Hosea and Gomer. (<http://www.palmu.st/etiopian/pdf/>)

God at Work - Your Christian Vocation in all of Life by Gene Veith, Jr. (Crossway, Wheaton 2002)

Appendix 1

The Family Budget

Luke 14:28-30 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

The Bible clearly advises us to plan for our economy. It is, however, not very common amongst the African Christians to do that. Many people are living with repeated loans. There are even many regular family expenses, which seem to come as "sudden, unforeseen" expenses - every year! For example, how many people take loans to pay expenses for annual feasts (like Christmas, Easter, etc.)? How many farmers take a loan every year to pay for their seed-grain?

Of course we know that the country is poor and poor people do not have extra money to put aside. But we should realize that it is the poor who especially need to plan and make a budget for their living! As responsible Christians we should learn to live with what we have, and NOT live with the money we dream to have!

Make your own Family Budget!

Sit down with your spouse and make a plan that shows how to spend your money each month. Somebody has said: "As we are careful to be unselfish and to spend within our budget, our money lasts until the end of the month, and we quarrel. Start with writing down all the income you will probably have during the month. No hiding! First, make a list of all permanent expenses you have. Then make estimations of other expenses since you cannot know for sure all the changing expenses. Then, the two of you together (!), make a plan how best to use the possible remaining money.

What to do if there is not enough money?

After you have finished the first round plan, then do an evaluation. *What if there is nothing leftover?* Realizing this reality together helps both of you to accept the sad fact that you must postpone any plans that you don't have money for now. *What if the budget shows deficit?* There you should be very careful indeed! If you see that the expenses are exceeding the income, then you should, out of necessity, decide together what expenses you are going to leave out. Never make a deficit-based budget for your family!

Appendix 2

The Ten Commandments for a Healthy Christian Marriage

The basic biblical teaching on family life given above, based on Ephesians 5, is the foundation of a happy Christian family.

The key is for the husband to love his wife as his own body and for the wife to submit to her husband in the Lord. Problems arise when these two basic principles are broken. Based on those biblical principles we may offer the following Ten Commandments which warn couples about possible trouble spots in their marriages.

1. You shall not beat your spouse. For any spouse to beat his marriage partner creates fear and hatred. Usually, this is wife beating (men beating their wives). But some women actually shake or beat their husbands.

2. You shall not nag your spouse. Some wives or husbands are complainers. Complaining demoralizes the other. If the wife prepares delicious food, her husband still complains. The husband may never be satisfied. He never compliments his wife.

Wives can also complain about their husbands. In fact, nagging and complaining is the wife's way of beating her husband.

While the husband may beat his wife physically, the wife may frequently beat her husband with words. Complaining and nagging destroys marriage relationships. This is a real problem in Christian homes. Instead of dwelling on the strengths of the other spouse, their faults and failures are emphasized.

The Bible warns against the dangers of nagging. "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife" (Proverbs 21:9). "Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife" (Proverbs 21: 19).

3. You shall not be absent or unavailable in the home. Men should be available to their wives and children. Many husbands are strangers in their homes, not only because of a job in the city but because they spend time with men in the village instead of with the family. The husband may come home at night, tired from work. He may read the paper while ignoring his wife and children. Soon after eating he goes to bed.

This problem can also affect working wives. A professional woman with a good job may give her time and priority to her employment instead of to her husband and children. Home responsibilities are neglected by the working wife.

This problem is especially found among pastors and Christian workers. They may be so busy in the ministry that they neglect their wives and children. As a result many children from families of pastors grow up without knowing and loving the Lord.

4. You shall not intimidate (frighten) your spouse. Sometimes a wealthy person marries a poor spouse or a highly educated person marries a less educated spouse. When disagreements arise he or she may speak in a condescending (superior) way, making the other person feel inferior. The spouse may express pity or mercy for the other spouse because of his or her inferior status.

This is especially true of women who may be more highly educated or come from a rich family. They use their education or wealthy family as a club to make the husband feel inferior. This threatening attitude eliminates true love. A marriage relationship should be between two partners who value and respect each other.

5. You shall not neglect the needs of your family. Providing for the material needs of the family is most important. Whenever a man fails to provide as he should, the wife complains and quarrels with him. Most quarrels with a husband which are initiated by the wife relate to this neglect-failure to provide food or clothing, failure to care for the animals or failure to maintain the home.

A husband must make every effort to provide for his family according to his ability. Sometimes the reason he fails to do this is because of misuse of money outside the home, including drink or support of another family or woman friend.

6. You shall not make family decisions by yourself alone. Marriage is a partnership with both husband and wife contributing their ideas in discussions which lead to decisions in the home. When the wife dominates the husband, tension arises. When the husband makes a decision without consulting the wife, tension arises.

There needs to be flexibility on the part of both husband and wife. If the husband is rigid, inflexible and always insists that his wife must submit, quarrels will arise. Both need to be adaptable and flexible. Flexibility is especially difficult for the man but is most important. Many times the wife will suggest something and the husband will refuse. Later on he decides to do much the same thing which his wife suggested, but he claims the decision to be his own.

Tension also arises when mothers-in-law or fathers-in-law make decisions for a family. "Many cooks spoil the soup." A husband and wife may seek advice from others of the extended family, but it is the two spouses which must discuss and come to the conclusion. It is also the husband who is responsible to make the final decision. If he fails to do so, after the wife and children offer their contribution, then he has failed, for they look to him to make the final decision.

7. You shall not falsely accuse your spouse. Though women often accuse their husbands of not providing for the family, these accusations are not always genuine. While men are slow to make their wives look bad before others, women are more quick to do this. In one case, a wife brought all kinds of accusations against her husband before her parents in a marital dispute. When his chance came to give his complaints, he kept quiet. In fact, he commented that she was an excellent wife.

Eventually, she felt ashamed and gladly decided to return to her husband. When men are unhappy with their wives, many resort to physical beating. A wife is usually unable to beat her husband because she is weaker. But when a wife is unhappy with her husband, she uses false complaints and accusations to beat him. Women often invite physical beating because of their false accusations.

The hearts of the wives and husbands are the same. Both need to be changed so that the husband will love his wife as his own body and so that the wife will submit to her husband with a quiet and gentle spirit.

8. You shall not hide things from your spouse. Communication between husband and wife is essential for a healthy marriage. But it has not been very African for a man to communicate

much with his wife. Most members in church feel that a man who shares everything with his wife is a weak person. Many men deliberately hide many things from their wives.

Hiding things from your wife is not good for the following reasons:

a. Motives are selfish. For a husband to keep money secretly from his wife in a separate bank account is selfish. What will happen to it if he should die? The money may be completely lost for only the husband knows about this. That which should have helped the wife and children is lost because of selfish motives of the husband.

b. Unity in the home is not promoted. Christian marriage concerns the union of two individuals in an equal partnership. For one spouse to hide possessions, decisions, and thoughts from the other is to create division, not unity. By sharing with your wife the problems at work and other concerns, the wife can encourage the husband. Blessings are lost through lack of communication.

c. Transparency, honesty, and openness are essential for the development of trust. A marriage will break down if one spouse does not trust the other. But trust cannot be promoted without honest, open communication. If the husband always says, "I have no money," trust is not developed.

9. You shall not be hardhearted and tough with your spouse. Men do not like to be considered weak or soft. They want to be strong and tough. Perhaps this is one reason why so few men become Christians. Because a Christian should be gentle, men may reject the Christian life style because they want to be known as strong men. So they act tough with their wives.

Men fail to understand that being tender-hearted and compassionate is an act of strength. Even men cry when they are grieved over the loss of some friend. Being tough is a front for many men.

However, the Bible teaches that one Christian virtue for all believers is to be tender-hearted. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate (tender-hearted) to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31,32).

Whenever a husband is compassionate to his wife, loving her as his own body, he will seek to understand her, feel with her and walk in her shoes. Instead of being hardhearted and tough toward her, he will be tender and compassionate, helping her instead of dominating her.

Each spouse should learn to accept the other as he or she is, remembering that God is not yet finished with them (nor is He finished with you). A couple does not really know each other before marriage. After marriage each spouse learns many things about the other. Of course, each should be willing to grow but harmony only comes by learning to accept one another as they are. This requires grace, love, compassion and patience.

10. You shall not misuse sex in marriage. The Bible teaches that the husband should satisfy the personal sexual needs and desires of his wife only and the wife should do the same for her husband only (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). The couple should be tender with each other and think of the others needs and pleasure. This requires self control which the Holy Spirit can give. Big problems arise when either husband or wife use sex selfishly or to manipulate each other. Of course sexual intercourse should never ever be forced. Examples of sin are when the husband looks at other women (perhaps he looks at pornography) which causes him to lose

desire for his wife. Or the wife will only have sexual intercourse with the husband if he does what she says. There needs to be openness between the husband and the wife about these matters and forgiveness. This issue is not only intercourse but being close to one another in bed and in life. When a spouse thinks only of himself in a selfish manner, he then denies the conjugal (marital) rights of his or her spouse. Young married couples are wise to get help in this area from a counsellor. In short, God requires husbands and wives to be faithful to each other alone, and not to look outside the marriage for satisfaction in the area of sexual intercourse. God can help in this matter.

Conclusion

Since God is the author and designer of marriage, we would be wise to follow his instructions for a happy marriage. If the husband would love his wife as his own body and the wife would submit to her husband in the Lord; if the father and mother together would rear their children with careful and faithful teaching, living as godly examples, providing wise and loving discipline; if the children would obey their parents in the Lord, then the family would be one that honours Christ and a joy to each member. Arising out of these basic biblical principles there are Ten Commandments which would enable husbands and wives to live together in harmony and peace.

(From A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa, Theological Advisory Group, Scott Theological College, Kenya, 1996. Commandment 10 by Pastor B. Kennett 2014)

20/1/2015